

“‘**P**ull’ is a way we drag people—sometimes kicking and screaming—into performance. What we need to create is that internal push—that idea that they can have an impact on the organization.”

That was the way Loree Olsen of Career Track started a mesmerizing presentation on motivation at the annual conference of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America last November.

She said that employers and supervisors “cannot do things the way we did 10 years ago. You’ve got to have non-monetary ways to motivate that are creative and exciting.”

Perched atop psychologist Albert Maslow’s “Triangle of Human Needs” is self-actualization.

Below that, in

order, are: esteem, belonging, security and—at the bottom—survival, the basest need.

Morale, she said, is not about doing one thing 1000 percent better. It’s about doing 1000 things 1 percent better. “Give your employees something new to learn, not just more to do,” she recommended. “Take the ordinary and infuse it with the extraordinary.”

Most of all, you can’t treat employees with a cookie-cutter approach. Each must be treated differently.

“I don’t know that there’s any way you can create a system,” she

noted. “People do not mesh well with that square-peg-in-a-round-hole philosophy.”

Create a positive non-critical environment, she suggested. “Don’t let the dominant-submissive wars take place. Synergy is increased by recognizing the value of the differences in people.

“Yet one of the most important motivational factors is the power of shared experience and the bonding and buy-in that comes with it,” Olsen said, “We

need to treat employees the way we want employees to treat customers: with respect and consideration. And we need to let employees know there’s someone behind them who wants them to succeed.”

Olsen said that everyone at your business should be having some fun at work. When there’s a breakdown of fun, a breakdown of enjoyment, she noted, there’s a breakdown of performance.

The 10 characteristics of an optimal experience, she said, are:

- 1) excitement: the job must be exciting;
- 2) involvement: the employee must feel involved with others or with the company’s mission;
- 3) action: the job must not be static;
- 4) fulfillment: the employee must get a sense of accomplishment from the task(s);
- 5) freedom: employees must feel like they’re on their own;
- 6) appropriateness: something for the employee to do that the employee is capable of doing;
- 7) meaningfulness: the employee must feel that, when the job is done, it’s going to mean something;
- 8) control: the employee must feel in control of his or her destiny;
- 9) challenge: the task must stretch the employee’s abilities; and
- 10) understanding: the supervisor must understand the employee’s point of view.

If you have an apathetic worker, Olsen suggests you tell him or her:

“Jim, I can see that you don’t like the job. What can I do to make that job better?” Because “it costs five times more to fire, rehire and retrain than to make good use of the staff you’ve got.

“Play to your employees’ strengths. Positive information generates positive action; negative information generates negative action.”

If other problems arise, Olsen continued, you must supply “instant corrective and non-judgmental feedback in the form of challenge, competition, choice and creative solutions.”

The key is not trying to stop a bad event from happening, she observed. It’s how quickly you can regain your “balance,” land on your feet, absorb the shock and walk away.

“Switch your focus from what doesn’t work to what works. Make the job an optimal experience—magic,” she said. “Your life is too darned short to do without the magic any longer.” **LM**

Motivation: a push, not a pull

by JERRY ROCHE / Editor-in-Chief

